




TO: Mayor and Council

FROM: Sara Hensley, Interim Assistant City Manager 

DATE: May 18, 2017

SUBJECT: Follow-up to Graffiti Issues Memo dated April 13, 2017

Recently, a group of employees from various City Departments met with me to discuss the history and current reality surrounding the graffiti issues in the City of Austin. The information provided below outlines efforts to date.

In 1995, the City Council approved an ordinance amending the City Code to add a provision that prohibited graffiti and established offenses for property owners that allowed graffiti to remain on their property. In 2003, the City of Austin did a recodification of several provisions of the City Code. One of the provisions that were revised included Chapter 9-4-43 – Graffiti Prohibited. The recodification included amendments that clarified the responsibilities of property owners and the responsibilities of the City. A key point to note is the importance of property owners removing graffiti within 30 days.

In researching the two ordinances, there seemed to be confusion as to who would address graffiti on private property. The current ordinance in place requires the property owner to address graffiti. However, the City may provide assistance, at no cost, as long as a written request is submitted and authorization to enter the property and remove the graffiti is provided. The City is responsible for its own property (e.g., city buildings, street signs and retaining walls).

To remove graffiti, the Austin Youth Development Program (within our Austin Public Health Department) employs young adults ages 17-22 to remove graffiti, under the supervision of City employees. The AYD program provides youth development services around personal development and employability skills for those who may have had limited opportunities and/or who are considered at risk. The program's design includes educational and developmental activities within the year-long City work experience. Graffiti abatement is just a component of this program that focuses on youth development rather than the enforcement and prevention of graffiti.

While conferring with the other departments on what each does to address graffiti, we reached the realization that the City of Austin does not have a comprehensive plan to address graffiti, nor do we have a centralized unit to carry out such a plan.

In response to this fact, the following outline is provided as a plan of action that will be undertaken over the next year to address the growing issues regarding graffiti. The ultimate goal is the construction of an anti-graffiti action plan/blueprint for the City of Austin. The outline is as follows:

Step	Status
Form a City Team to develop a coordinated effort	Completed
Review best practices in other cities	In Progress
Determine a Lead Department	In Progress
Develop a City-wide survey to assess the overall graffiti issues. A follow-up survey will be conducted at the end of one year to measure the collective success	In development
Work with APD, Austin Code and Law department to determine enforcement and ordinance effectiveness	In development
Develop collective graffiti prevention strategies and alternatives	In development
Recruitment of graffiti volunteers, working with community groups, businesses and non-profits	In development
Develop a City-wide communication strategy	In development

Staff are currently reviewing the backlog and dividing the work into three areas: City-owned property, private property and other governmental entities.

Our plan is to tackle the backlog collectively and then establish a systematic approach to address graffiti on City property, while educating public/private property owners on their responsibilities. Our goal is to have the backlog and any other reported graffiti addressed by the end of this calendar year. This, along with a robust education campaign, should help begin the New Year with a more effective approach to our graffiti challenges.

Should you have any questions, please let me know.

Cc: Elaine Hart, Interim City Manager
 Rey Arellano, Assistant City Manager
 Anne Morgan, City Attorney
 Stephanie Hayden, Interim Director, Austin Public Health
 Cora D. Wright, Interim Director, Austin Code Department
 Brian Manley, Interim Chief, Austin Police Department